

Take a chance and be great

When I was first introduced to the value encapsulated by the Japanese idiom “ichi-go ichi-e”, the sheer power of its meaning “one chance in a lifetime”, or “treasure every encounter, for it will never recur” struck a personal chord. I pondered over the notion of evanescent chances for a while. Jimmy Johnson once asked, “Do you want to be safe and good, or do you want to take a chance and be great?” If these are the options, then my choice now would definitely be to take a chance and be great, for I have learnt that a chance not cherished will never return.

I have always been an opinionated child. This explains why before I even took the selection test for the prestigious Gifted Education Programme (GEP), regardless of how coveted it was, I was adamant that I would not take the programme up, even if I was selected. By a stroke of fate, I was selected amongst 9 other students from my school. Out of them all, only I turned down the offer, much to the incredulity of my schoolmates and teachers.

My teachers did everything in their power to convince me to do otherwise. Perhaps going out of my way to be different gave me a kick, perhaps it was my immature unfounded prejudice against the programme which I labeled as “academically elitist”, but before even considering the chance I was given, I gave it up.

Ironically, 4 years later in secondary school, I was placed under the School-Based Gifted Education, which caused my blanket stereotype of the GEP to undergo a drastic change. As time passed, I came to the startling realization that I actually enjoyed learning under the enriched scheme the programme adopted; I enjoyed interacting with my classmates whom I initially ignorantly labeled as “elitist”. This was when I started to question my hasty decision of previously turning down the programme. Would I have gained more knowledge if I had taken up the chance then? Would I have become a better person? However, whatever regrets I had were futile, for the chance that I did not cherish would never return. It was ichi-go ichi-e in play.

Ichigo ichi-e is famously known as the theme of Japanese tea ceremonies. The host and the guests believe that every tea ceremony is unique as even though the actions of serving the tea can be simulated, the experience and atmosphere can never be replicated. Bearing this concept in mind, the host seeks to serve the guests with utmost sincerity. In return, the guests strive to intently savour every moment of the elaborate, once-in-a-lifetime ceremony. Similarly, just like how the Japanese appreciate the uniqueness of every tea ceremony, I believe that every chance granted in life is unparagoned and should be cherished. The power of the word “chance” should never be underestimated.

These four words ichi-go ichi-e have provided me with a fresh new insight, which can be expressed through Sophocles’ quote “Chance never helps those who do not help themselves.” Indeed, it is true that chances are always there for the taking, but will only favour those who court her; it is true that a chance is a risk but if you don’t risk anything, you risk even more. Hence, to everyone, I urge: Take a chance and be great.